



THE SECRETARY OF VETERANS AFFAIRS  
WASHINGTON

April 23, 2007

Mr. James Bombard  
Chairman  
Veterans' Advisory Committee on Education  
Division of Veterans' Affairs  
5 Empire State Plaza  
Suite 2836  
Albany, NY 12223-1551

Dear Mr. Bombard:

Thank you for your letter transmitting the report of the Veterans' Advisory Committee on Education. Our responses to the Committee's recommendations are enclosed.

I appreciate the interest and careful consideration the Committee has given to veterans' education issues. The Montgomery GI Bill and other educational programs are valuable tools for our service members and veterans, aiding in their re-adjustment to civilian life after valiantly serving our country.

I am glad I had the opportunity to be part of your last meeting and speak to the Committee members about providing better services for veterans.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "R. James Nicholson", is written over a horizontal line.

R. James Nicholson

Enclosure

## **Department of Veterans Affairs (VA)**

### **Responses to Veterans' Advisory Committee on Education Recommendations March 2007**

**Access to Higher Education** – The Committee recommends that the Secretary send a letter to private colleges and universities, encouraging these institutions to recruit today's veterans by offering financing assistance that would supplement the benefits of the MGIB.

**VA Response** - VA agrees with the Committee that more can be done to encourage private colleges and universities to contribute to veterans' educational needs by developing financial programs geared toward veterans. VA will be working with the Committee to develop the appropriate means of accomplishing this recommendation. We will provide an update on this initiative at the Fall meeting.

**Remediation, Education and Entitlement Change** – The Committee recommends that GI Bill benefit entitlement not be charged to veterans who are in need of remedial education assistance to be qualified to enter an institution of higher learning. This is similar to the administration under chapter 31 (vocational rehabilitation).

**VA Response** - Providing remediation education to veterans without charging their education entitlement would require new legislation. Although this option is offered under VA's vocational rehabilitation and employment programs, the Committee's main concern seems to be that requirements for entry to higher learning institutions vary from state to state. VA will consider this suggestion when preparing legislative proposals for fiscal year 2009.

**Work Study Extension** – The Committee recommends that the Secretary support a provision making permanent the authorization for the use of work study for providing hospital and domiciliary care to veterans in State veterans homes, activities relating to the administration of a national cemetery or a State veterans' cemetery; or helping State approving agencies with providing outreach services to veterans and servicemembers.

**VA Response** - VA agrees that the work study program is an invaluable tool to our VA hospitals, national cemeteries, and other VA facilities and is pleased that the provisions allowing work study activities to assist with services for veterans provided by these facilities was extended until June 30, 2007. VA will continue to be an advocate for this program and will make OMB and Congress aware of the positive impact that the work study program has had on veterans.

**Total Force** – The Committee requests a report from the working group established by the Secretary to study the Committee's recommendation on a Total Force GI Bill.

**VA Response** - The Working Group has met many times to assess the Total Force GI Bill proposal presented by the Committee, including development of a detailed cost analysis. Members of the Working Group have discussed elements of the Total Force concept with the Benefits Executive Counsel (BEC) and the Joint Executive Counsel (JEC), which are comprised of Department of Defense and VA senior leaders. VA is looking forward to receiving the Working Group's report and is optimistic that the Working Group will be successful in developing a sound approach to streamlining education benefit programs. We will provide a status report at the next meeting.

**Veterans Education Public-Private Partnership Community Based Initiative – Pilot Program** – The Committee recommends the following:

**Recommendation A:** The Veterans Advisory Committee on Education highly recommends that the Secretary of Veterans Affairs introduce and develop a new grant program for school offices of veteran's affairs from both public and private sector sources, titled the Veterans Service Education and Training (VSET) program grant.

**Recommendation B:** The VACOE recommends that a one-year pilot program be initiated where both private and public, 4-year and 2-year institutions of higher learning are invited to participate in the test program. The guidelines set forth in the suggested grant initiative should be followed with regard to time lines and program evaluation reporting contained in the attached proposal.

**Recommendation C:** That the Secretary of Veterans Affairs pursue funding for the establishment for campus base veterans affairs offices program from both public and private sectors and all elements and resources of the President's Faith Based and Community Initiative program be petitioned with a view toward obtaining funding support for this proposed grant program.

**VA Response** - Veteran Affairs Officers within institutions of higher learning are key players in the delivery of educational benefits. VA recognizes the value of partnering with external groups to fulfill its mission of service to veterans, and it currently has several grant programs that provide financial assistance to homeless veteran facilities, state veteran homes' construction programs, as well as National Cemeteries grant programs. We are open to exploring greater partnership in the delivery of educational benefits. The Education Service and the Center for Faith-Based and Community Initiatives will explore the Committee's pilot-program concept for creating an effective program that will serve veterans educational needs on college campuses. We will provide an update on this effort at a subsequent meeting.

**Other Issues Discussed by the Committee at the October Meeting:**

**Accelerated Payment Provision:** The Committee's recommendation that VA work closely with Congress to adopt an accelerated payment provision that meets the needs of our veterans, which is also fiscally responsible, is well received. VA will continue to provide comment on proposed legislation to Congress when requested to do so and will pay special attention to any potential abuses of the accelerated payment program.

**VEAP (Vietnam-Era Education Assistance Program):** Congressional action would be required to implement the Committee's recommendation to provide VEAP program participants another opportunity to convert to the Montgomery GI Bill (MGIB). If Congress asks VA to review the implications of this legislation, we can more directly respond to this suggestion.

**Delimiting Date:** The Committee concluded that the ten-year delimiting date should be removed from the MGIB to make it a life-long learning opportunity. This change would require legislation. Senate Bill S. 22, "The Post-9/11 Veterans Educational Assistance Act of 2007," proposes extending the current delimiting date of ten years to 15 years.

**The Concept of Transferability:** The Army Transferability Program was implemented July 21, 2006. As of January 26, 2007, the Army identified 55 eligible spouses, and VA accounted for only six individuals who have filed a claim to receive the benefit. VA will continue to work closely with the Army and look forward to seeing Army's evaluation of the Transferability Program.